

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
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R 171100Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6903
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
DIA WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0951

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PLO, SY
SUBJ: KHALID FAHUM DISCUSSES ALGIERS SUMMIT AND CURRENT PALES-
TINIAN DEVELOPMENTS

REF: DAMASCUS 0902

1. SUMMARY: PNC CHAIRMAN FAHUM TOLD US JOURNALIST THAT
ASSAD HAD BEEN OUTSPOKENLY MODERATE AT ALGIERS SUMMIT,
ASSERTING THAT IF ANY MOVEMENT TOWARD GENEVA DEVELOPED
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UNDER UN UMBRELLA WITH BOTH SUPERPOWERS PARTICIPATING HE
WOULD BE READY TO PARTICIPATE. FAHUM ALSO SAID PNC WOULD
CONVENE MARCH 28-30 AND APPEARED TO BE LEANING TOWARD
ALGIERS AS MOST FAVORABLE SITE.

2. AMERICAN JOURNALIST HAS SHARED WITH US FOLLOWING
HIGHLIGHTS OF HIS FEB. 15 MEETING WITH PALESTINIAN

NATIONAL COUNCIL CHAIRMAN KHALID FAHUM. FAHUM COMMENTED ON ALGIERS SUMMIT THAT IT WAS BETTER ORGANIZED THAN TRIPOLI AND MODERATION HAD PREVAILED. QADHAFI, FOR EXAMPLE, HAD WANTED TO BREAK RELATIONS WITH EGYPT BUT WHEN HE MADE THIS PROPOSAL AT ALGIERS HE WAS OPPOSED BY ASSAD AND BOUMEDIENE. ASSAD, FAHM SAID, HAD TOLD ALGIERS SUMMIT SYRIA CONTINUED TO SUPPORT UNSC RES. 338 AND THAT IF THERE WAS A MOVE TO GO TO GENEVA UNDER UN UMBRELLA WITH BOTH SUPER POWERS PARTICIPATING, HE WOULD BE READY TO GO. IN THIS POSITION, FAHUM ADDED, HE WAS SUPPORTED BY BOUMEDIENE AND BY PDRY.

3. ON RECENTLY CONCLUDED PCC MEETING FAHUM SAID 40 TO 55 MEMBERS HAD ATTENDED. PFLP, HOWEVER, HAD NOT PARTICIPATED BECAUSE ITS MEMBERS WERE STILL LEERY OF COMING TO DAMASCUS.

4. FAHUM CONFIRMED THAT PCC HAD NOT REACHED DECISION REGARDING SITE OF NEXT PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING. HE SAID FIVE SITES WERE POSSIBLE: ALGIERS, DAMASCUS, TRIPOLI, KUWAIT AND TUNISIA WITH FIRST THREE BEING THE MOST LIKELY. DAMASCUS, HOWEVER, HAD DISADVANTAGE THAT REJECTIONIST GROUPS WOULD HESITATE TO COME. TRIPOLI HAD DISADVANTAGE THAT QADAAFI WOULD BLANTLY TRY TO PRESSURE MEMBERS AND INFLUENCE RESULTS: AND ALGIERS HAD DIS-
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ADVANTAGE OF BEING HARD FOR MAY DELEGATES TO REACH. ON THE OTHER HAND, FAHUM MUSED, BOUMEDIENE HAD HANDLED ALGIERS SUMMIT VERY WELL IN CONTRAST TO QADHAFI'S HANDLING OF TRIPOLI SUMMIT. FAHUM SAID HE EXPECTED PNC TO CONVENE MARCH 28-30 AND THAT DECISION ON SITE WOULD BE TAKEN MARCH 10 BY PLO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TOGETHER WITH FOUR-MEMBER PNC BUREAU. JOURNALIST HAD IMPRESSION FAHUM WAS LEANING TOWARDS ALGIERS. FAHUM ALSO SAID NUMBER OF DELEGATES WOULD BE SAME AS 1977 PNC - 293.

5. JOURNALIST ASKED FAHUM ABOUT RUMOR THAT PCC HAD ERUPTED IN HEATED ARGUMENT WITH ARAFAT DEFENDED PLO'S MAINTAINING RELATIONS WITH EGYPT. FAHUM REPLIED THIS WAS NOT ENTIRELY ACCURATE. ARAFAT, HE SAID, RECOGNIZED THERE WERE 60-70 THOUSAND PALESTINIANS IN EGYPT. ARAFAT WAS CLEARLY OPPOSED TO SADAT'S INITIATIVE BUT DID NOT WANT TO CALL SADAT A TRAITOR SINCE THIS WOULD ANGER EGYPTIANS WHO AS A PEOPLE SHOULD BE CLUTIVATED BY PALESTINIANS. FAHUM EXPRESSED HIS OWN VIEW THAT ALL SADAT WOULD BE ABLE TO GET FROM ISRALIS WOULD BE A SEPARATE, BILATERAL DEAL.

6. ON PURPOSES AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF NEXT PNC SESSION, FAHUM SAID PURPOSE WOULD BE TO DECIDE ON NEW POLICY FOR PLO IN LIGHT OF SADAT'S INITIATIVES AND NEW PROGRAM WHICH WOULD BE MORE EXTREMIST THAN RESULTS OF LAST PNC SESSION. HABASH WOULD PARTICIPATE AND THERE WOULD BE NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHOSEN. PNC MIGHT SPECIFICALLY SAY NO TO NEGOTIATIONS AND NO TO GENEVA. UNTIL NOW PLO HAD BECOME MORE MODERATE EVERY YEAR BUT IF SADAT CONTINUED HIS PRESENT POLICIES AND ISRAEL CONTINUED ESTABLISHING NEW SETTLEMENTS, MORE EXTREMIST PNC/PLO POSITION WOULD BE THE RESULT.

7. ON PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE, FAHUM SAID HE DOUBTED HE WOULD PUT IT ON THE AGENDA. ASKED WHY, CONFIDENTIAL

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HE REPLIED PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT NEEDED FIRST AND FOREMOST TO RESTORE UNITY WITH ALL GROUPS AND LEADERS PARTICIPATING AND IT WAS BETTER TO POSTPONE QUESTIONS WHICH MIGHT CREATE SPLITS.

8. FAHUM SAID PALESTINIAN FRIENDS OF SADAT WERE ALREADY SPREADING STORY THAT PRESIDENT CARTER HAS PROMISED SADAT A MARSHALL PLAN FOR EGYPT WHICH WOULD, OVER THREE OR FOUR YEARS, MAKE IT THE ECONOMIC CENTER OF BOTH THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFIRCA. FAHUM SAID HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THERE WAS ANYTHING TO THIS STORY OR WHETHER IT WAS MERELY PART OF A PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN TO SELL THE SADAT INITIATIVE TO THE EGYPTIAN PEOPLE.

9. COMMENT: FAHUM'S DESCRIPTION OF ASSAD'S POSITION AT ALGIERS IS MORE MODERATE THAN WHAT SYRIANS HAVE BEEN SAYING IN PUBLIC ABOUT THEIR WILLINGNESS TO REJOIN PEACE PROCESS. THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS HAVE FOCUSED ON OPPOSING PRESIDENT SADAT RATHER THAN WAYS SYRIA MIGHT REENTER NEGOTIATIONS. WE DO NOT READ ASSAD'S ASSERTIONS AS MEANING SYRIA WOULD AUTOMATICALLY SIGN ON TO A RENEWED GENEVA CONFERENCE PROPOSAL BUT RATHER ONLY THAT SYRIA MIGHT BE WILLING TO CONSIDER AND NEGOTIATE OVER TERMS ON WHICH IT WOULD ATTEND SUCH A CONFERENCE. FAHUM ATTENDED THE ALGIERS SUMMIT SO HE WAS NOT SPEAKING SECOND-HAND. AS A KNOWN MODERATE WITHIN PALESTINIAN CIRCLES, HOWEVER, HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN INCLINED TO PLAY UP ASSAD'S "MODERATION" AT ALGIERS. MURPHY

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